

Living with climate change in our backyards

by Elizabeth Bella



Does climate change affect bluff erosion on the Kenai Peninsula? Find out this Saturday at a free workshop on climate change and what to do about it at the [Kenai Peninsula College](#).

Here on the Kenai Peninsula we can all agree that this winter has been strange. The effects of a changing climate are becoming obvious in many ways, including the discouraging plus-forty-degree rain and lack of snow cover. We can celebrate lower heating costs, but many of us have missed our usual winter activities.

We likely all agree that this is a pretty special place

to live, and there are countless reasons why all of us have chosen to make this land our home. One question we can all ask ourselves is “what do we love about the Kenai Peninsula?” My friends and colleagues share many common themes in response—love of the ocean, forests, wildlife, camping, fishing and hunting. We love our close-knit communities, our access to wild and beautiful places, and our stunning scenery. In the simplest sense, we love our way of life here.

With a changing climate, the future is uncertain. Beyond just this weird winter, we’ve all experienced other aspects of change. Last summer’s massive Funny River Fire is still fresh in everyone’s memory, and we’re all nervous about the lack of snowpack and moisture this coming spring with the threat of grassland fires in April. Higher temperatures in nonglacial streams are already falling into the lethal range for salmon during short periods in July. The increased growing season for vegetables and fruits also means a better environment for many non-native plants and animals. Although apparent sea level rise in our surrounding marine waters is not yet a concern, bigger storms are generating larger waves and increasing coastal erosion, and flooding events seem more frequent.

Other changes may be subtler, such as pollinators becoming out of sync with the plants and flowers they have evolved to pollinate—which could result in widespread changes or diebacks of native flora, also affecting wildlife food sources.

We do know that our actions today can guide and direct the kind of future we want for our grandchildren’s grandchildren, so starting the conversation now will help our communities plan for climate change. Please join the Kenai Refuge in supporting the Central Peninsula League of Women Voters and the Kenai Peninsula College Student Union at the upcoming Climate Change in Our Backyard workshop, taking place this Saturday, March 28th, at [Kenai Peninsula Community College](#). The workshop starts at 9AM and continues to 4PM—and is entirely free, with lunch and snacks provided. Attend for the whole day, or stop in for some of the speakers and discussions as your schedule allows.

The workshop culminates in a mayor's panel discussion, preceded by several researchers who will speak to what we know about local effects on Kenai's climate, plants and wildlife, wildfire, coastal erosion, and salmon. The featured keynote speaker at lunchtime is author Nancy Lord of Homer.

The mayor's panel discussion is a chance for all community members to weigh in with their ideas and concerns about climate change. The mayor or their representative from the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the cities of Homer, Seward, Kenai and Soldotna will help us think through ways that we can begin developing adaptive strategies and solutions to cope with real and anticipated climate changes. The good news is that change brings opportunities.

More information about the workshop, including the agenda and a variety of resources, news, and videos about climate change is available on the workshop website, <http://kenaichange.org>. You can also like the Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/kenaichange>. There's a Facebook Event set up, so you can join and invite others: <https://www.facebook.com/events/837357299669445/>.

While the workshop isn't able to live stream the event by internet this year, we will be recording the talks and discussion for later viewing and discus-

sion. The organizers strongly encourage all communities, big and small, from around the Peninsula to participate—so take advantage of ride sharing opportunities to come to Soldotna this Saturday. There's a link to a [Kenai Peninsula Facebook ridesharing page](#) on the workshop webpage, or get in touch with friends and neighbors that may be interested in catching all or part of the workshop on Saturday.

The workshop will also feature a children's program for all interested families with kids ages 3 to 10. Please pre-register on the website's contact page. Kids will enjoy a variety of educational activities and give a presentation to the main workshop during the lunch break.

Since it's unlikely any of us will be out skiing or snowmachining this Saturday, be sure to stop by and join the conservation, meet your neighbors, hear some interesting talks, and enjoy free refreshments and a local-ingredient lunch. As a community we have the opportunity to start planning now for anticipated changes to ensure that our spectacular, unique, and beloved landscape is still intact for future generations.

Elizabeth Bella is an ecologist at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Visit <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/> for more information about the Refuge.